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ELODIE

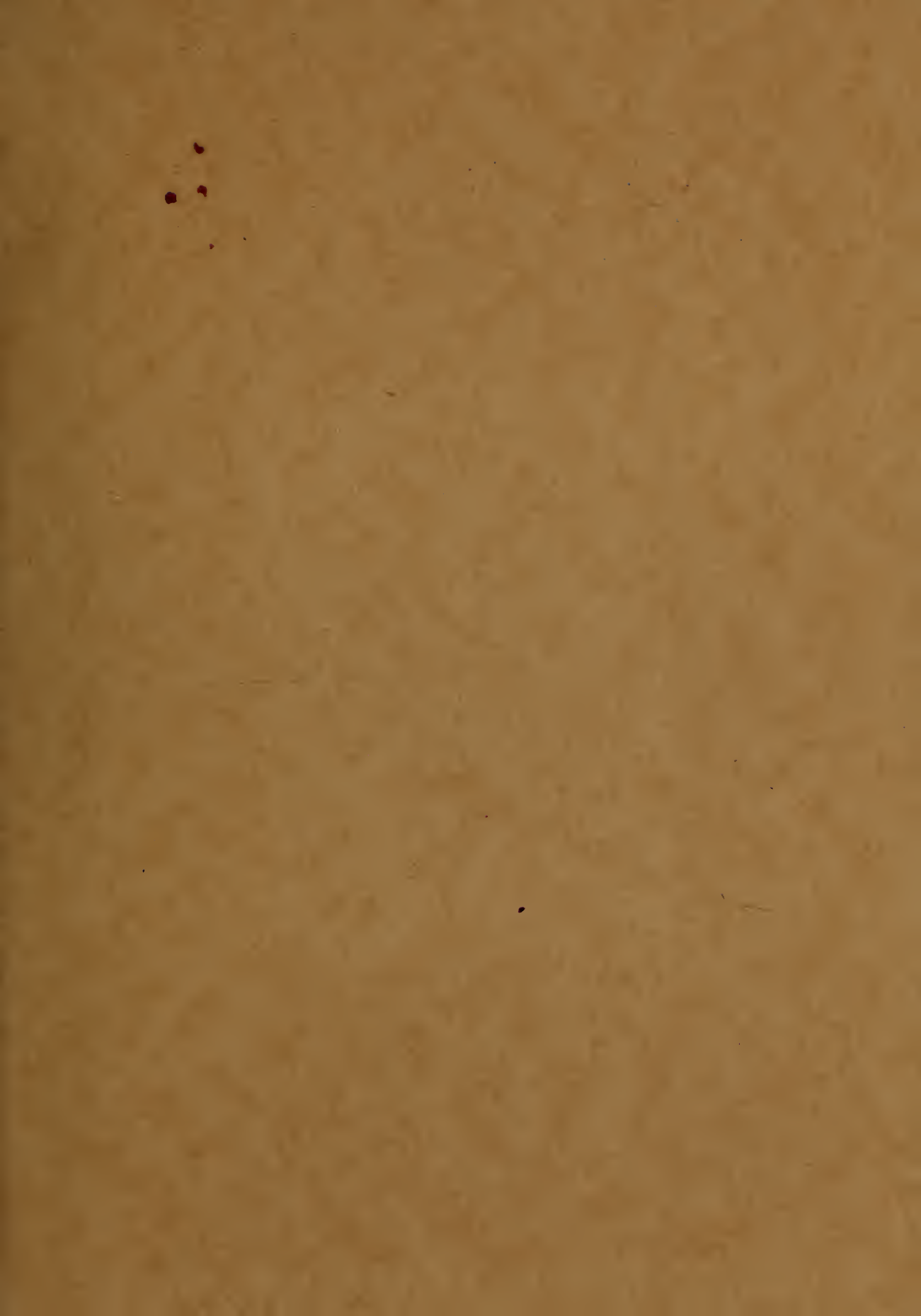


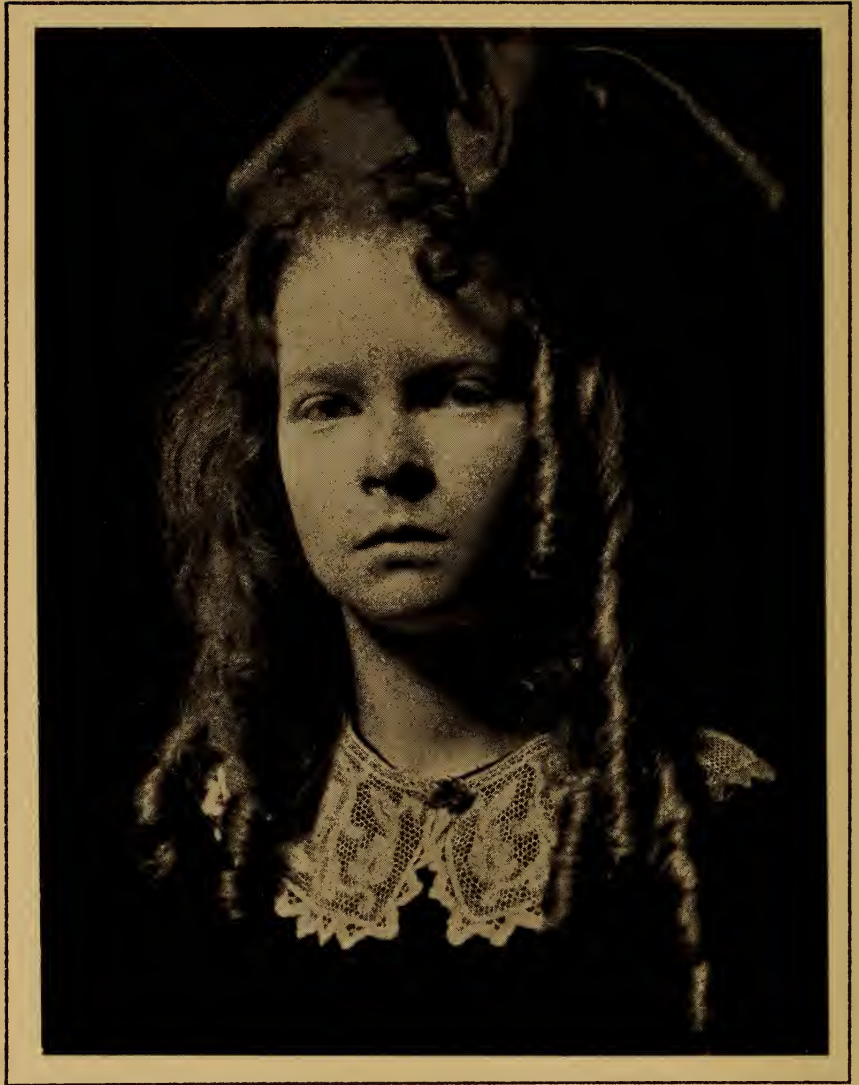
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Eloë.

ELODIE

Being *a* Sketch
of the Life *of* Elodie Farnum *as* set forth
in a Letter *by*

JOHN RUSSELL



PROVIDENCE

Privately printed *for* Elodie's Mother
by the Livermore & Knight Company

MCMXVII

CT275
.F42 R8

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PROVIDENCE, R. I.

APR 12 1917

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no. 1.

A LETTER

TO ALL *THE* CHILDREN

BOYS *and* GIRLS, BIG *and* LITTLE, RICH *and* POOR

WHO ARE ALREADY ENJOYING

OR MAY EVER ENJOY

THE

ELODIE FARNUM

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MY DEAR CHILDREN :

I am an Englishman and a stranger. I do not know you and shall probably never know you. Yet I want to write to you. For although I have never been to Providence, never even to any part of your wonderful America, I am an old friend of Elodie Farnum, and I want to tell you something about her, that she may be more than a name to you.

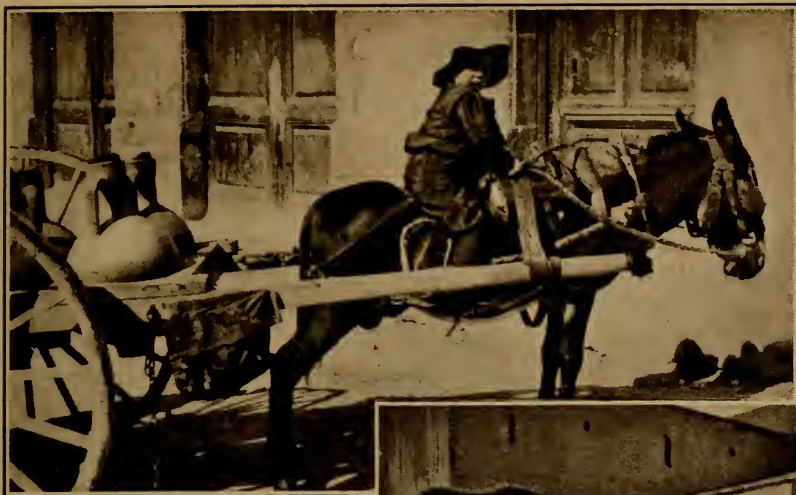
We first met in 1904 on Christmas day. I had been ill and my wife had taken me for rest and sunshine to the Oasis of Biskra in the Sahara. Thither also had wandered from Paris her painter father and her mother in search of sunshine and subjects. That Christmas morning my wife and I had walked too far and I was tired. There was a ramshackle little old tram to take us home, but I had carelessly gone out with empty pockets. In the distance we spied three figures in European dress — a man, a woman, and a little blue bunch

of a child. I approached them, put our case, and borrowed our fares. Presently we rode back together, and before the end of the journey a new friendship had blossomed. We cared nothing for each other's names. We exchanged callings, and at once became Mr. and Mrs. "Painter" and Mr. and Mrs. "Schoolmaster" to each other. And so we have remained ever since. I forget when our true names were revealed. I think it was about the time of Elodie's third birthday, when we sent her our good wishes in the following unusual form:

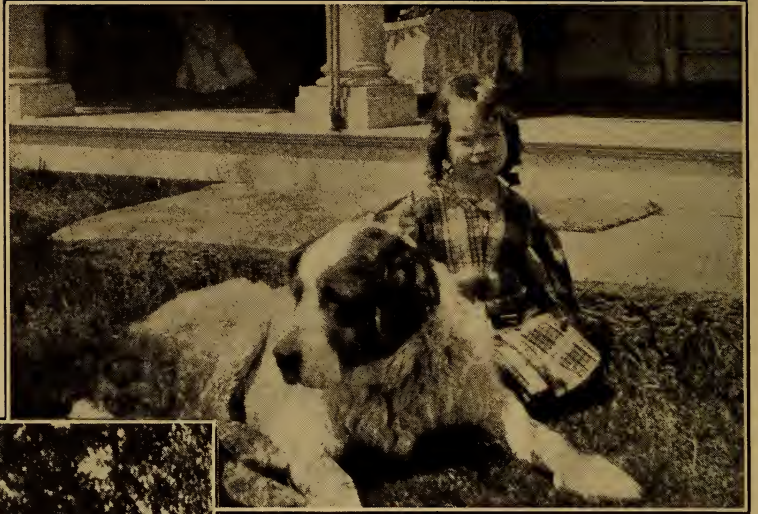
COLLECT FOR THE DAY

February 18, 1905

O Lord God Almighty, maker of all things, whom no man knoweth, but whom every man in the deep of his heart desireth to know, we who have so long yet with so many shortcomings enjoyed thy great gift of life, dedicate today to thy holy service this little child now growing into power, in the hope that she may in due season taste the joy of knowledge, learn to winnow evil from good, and grow into strength to serve all those thy other creatures amongst whom thou hast appointed her to walk. We know that this is possible for all thy children; that in the hidden decrees of thy infinite wisdom, open to all such as in a full trust in thy power diligently search them out, there have been established from all eternity laws



*Snap-shots of
Elodie
in Foreign Lands*



*“Her real playground was
out-of-doors, and her chief playmate
‘Nature, that good old Nurse.’ ”*

of unerring guidance, in which all faithful parents, teachers, pastors and unsubject souls may find even here upon thy earth the sure way of salvation. Amen.

We were near neighbours in the strange little settlement, and for nearly three months we were in almost daily contact. With Mr. Farnum I shared one glorious adventure, and in a serious illness which subsequently fell upon him, my wife was of the greatest comfort to Mrs. Farnum. Elodie, we remember as a golden-haired little plump fairy — crawling, toddling, chattering, laughing, crooning. Of music we had none, save the songs we carried in our heads, and the monotonous warble of an occasional Arab pipe. Yet, though we never suspected, the beginnings of melody and rhythm must even then have been stirring in the little musician mind. Perhaps the most radiant remembrance is of her joyous absorption in the liquid silver of the sand-dunes. To set it rippling over hands and feet was a never-failing enchantment to her, and one from which she never willingly turned away. If there were ever tears, I have forgotten them. Once or twice for some special reason I was honoured for a few hours with the sole care of her, and I well remember

my anxieties and the compensating bits of humour. I cannot pretend that she consciously loved us, but I think she always found us quite tolerable companions and a pleasant change. As for myself, she was just the child-link I needed between my busy world of boys and girls at home and my new idle world of palm-tree, tent, camel, and illimitable desert. In Elodie I saw not one Elodie but a thousand Elodies; not one particular child, but the universal child — the universal child upon whose well-being depends the well-being of the generations to be, and to whose well-being I, as a school-master, have dedicated my life.

But our pleasant little quintet too soon reached its finale. Mr. "Painter" had engagements in Algiers and went off to fulfill them, carrying Mrs. and Miss "Painter" with him. I remember our goodbyes at the railway station — father, mother, and the little bunch of new life packed snugly into the high wooden carriage — almost as well as if they had been spoken yesterday. None of us were deeply troubled — Elodie of course least of all — because they were so soon to be our guests in London. But there was an emptiness in our two hearts as we made our way home alone.

The Summer duly brought them to us in our

own home, and I remember how Elodie, dressed for the occasion in our own green school uniform, was introduced to my own boys and girls, who had heard much of her in letters, and who petted her not a little. I remember, too, a long June day in a corner of our country chalk-pit at Letchworth gay with elder blossom and wild rose, and since named "Painter's Hollow." The lush grass made a better carpet even than the desert sand and Elodie took full joy in it. We should like to think that the many beauties of that day added something to the store of beauty she must already have been unconsciously garnering.

Then at last America called them home again and we have never seen them since. Letters and letters, pictures and photographs and books, but for ten years no sight, and now, of our little Elodie, grown big and loving and creative, no sight any more.

What I am going to tell you then of the growth and wonderful blossoming of those ten years can only be what others have told me, bejewelled with a few little letters and poems of her own.





HE was born in your own Providence on February 18, 1902 — first and best of the valentines with which she so often delighted her mother. It is said that before she was three she could sing “in perfect tune” simple airs she had heard sung, and that before she was four she sang by heart many of the verses in Stevenson’s “Child’s Garden.” By the time she was six she had become — without suspecting it — quite a traveller, having flitted with her parents now to the Bermudas, now to London and Paris, now to Algiers and the Sahara. Not till she was past seven did she begin to learn to read — in the old beautiful way at her mother’s knee. At about the same time she began the violin with a master, practising at first only about fifteen minutes a day. She also began the piano by ear. Soon after eight she played her violin in public for the first time (at Fall River, Massachusetts) and again shortly afterwards in Providence. At this second appearance — before six-hundred people — she played, the critics said, “with an accuracy of tone and maturity of style quite unusual in so young a performer.”

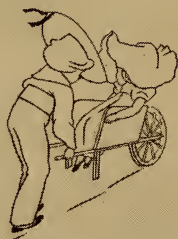
To school in the ordinary sense she never went, but between eight and nine, she began taking



*On the morning
after her first recital*

day - not much like Tues-
day evening when Mother
and I were outdoors look-
ing at the sunset. We saw
a great white cloudbird
with wings spread. I
love "cloudbird" and I
know that I shall see
ways associa-
you. I feel like

this afternoon, but I have
n't anybody to play
with. I can't play with
Mon. all the time.
Wouldn't it be nice if
we were together? Have
you told Charlie that I
am coming in Septem-
ber? I think he
to see me?



Aug 7, 1913.

Mine dearest friend:

Mother is
sitting here beside me sew-
ing, while I am writing
to you. The sky is heavy
with dark clouds to-

Facsimile reproduction of a letter
written by Elodie (full text of this
letter on page 16).

lessons in spelling and arithmetic, essential — in moderation — even to genius. But her real playground was out-of-doors, and her chief playmate, “Nature, that good old Nurse.” Of fields, flowers, woods, sunsets, birds and beasts, she spoke — it seemed — the native language, and she loved little other company so well. She loved, too, to translate their intimate talk with her into picture, or song, or fairy make-believe — in which she especially delighted. To many grown people, indeed, she was herself the very personification of fairyhood. She was barely ten when she went to her first Symphony Concert and also heard Ysaye. There is no record of her emotions, but how wonderfully must deep have called unto deep ! Soon afterwards she played for the first time for the Providence Monday Morning Musical Club, which a few days later honoured her with membership, and now, only a few years later, has honoured her memory in the beautiful way you know — by dedicating this Memorial Library to her abiding spirit. Throughout 1913, her last year of unbroken health, she played much in public, and wrote many little sets of verses, several of them illustrated in colour. She also began with tutors the formal study of English Literature

and French. To this time belongs the following characteristic letter:

August 7, 1913.

MINE DEAREST FRIEND:

Mother is sitting here beside me sewing, while I am writing to you. The sky is heavy with dark clouds today — not much like Tuesday evening when Mother and I were outdoors looking at the sunset. We saw a great white cloudbird with wings spread. I love “cloudbird” and I know that I shall always associate it with you. I feel like romping this afternoon, but I haven’t anybody to play with. I can’t play with Monk all the time. Wouldn’t it be nice if *we* were together! Have you told Charlie that I am coming in September? Don’t you think he will be glad to see me? My lovely roses are almost as fresh today as they were when you brought them to me Tuesday. Mother is going to read to me now, then I may sew a little for Lady Rosalind. Much love and many kisses.

FROM ELODIE.

At Christmas, 1913, she was suddenly and unexpectedly taken ill, and had to give up all work. By her twelfth birthday, however, she seemed so much better that she returned to her beloved violin, and even played — at her own earnest request — for the M. M. M. C. But the flame, which had perhaps burned too brightly and too steadily, was only flickering, and three months later (May 15, 1914) it went out.



THAT, so far as I can piece it together, is the frame of the little life that I am trying to picture to you. But Elodie herself, and the wonderful child-soul that informed Elodie, are beyond my powers. A frank, sweet face in a halo of bright auburn hair; eyes alight with spirit and humour; eager, musical speech; swift, dainty fairy-like ways; and an easy alternation between grave and gay, service and mischief — so I seem to see her as I read the many letters I have received from her friends. And the very soul of honour and generosity and consideration, and, in spite of success and popular applause, entirely unspoiled, “just the same child as before.” “The best human being I ever met,” said a boy of her own age she had been kind to. She had indeed won troops of friends — of all sorts and ages.

As a child violinist she had, already made her mark, not only in her own personal circle, but among musicians of high standing, who unanimously foretold for her a brilliant career. I never heard her play, but among my own friends is a boy pianist of about her age who has already achieved fame, and whose wonderful playing, so simple, so sincere, so eloquent, so strangely exper-

ienched, always speaks to my imagination of her. "A little child shall lead them," I muse as I listen.

But music was not her only gift. It is said on good authority that with her fine intelligence and her power of almost impersonal absorption in work, she might have attained to equal success in almost any subject of her choice. In drawing, especially, she had inherited from her artist father, and must have taken many an unconscious lesson when watching him at work. Most lovely and pleasant in their lives were her mother and she, each at times, I am told, leading, each at times gladly willing to be led. Mother's valentines were her first and last verses. Mother's arms were her unfailing refuge from the public platform. And now Mother's heart, in spite of a worldful of child-redeemers, is empty and desolate.





CHILD-REDEEMERS! Do you wonder why I say that? Because, in the first place, the world, in spite of the myriads of noble men and women who have lived in it and died for it, is still unredeemed, is still for the most part unjust, cruel and revengeful. And because, in the second place, it is only you children who on the wide altar of the world can keep the fires of hope eternally burning. Have you, I wonder, ever realized that the total management of the world, material and moral, is steadily passing out of our hands who are old into yours who are young, and that in a few swift years all whom you now love and trust will have passed away — as Elodie too soon has passed — and that you boys and girls and your fellows will have taken our places, as fathers and mothers, as responsible citizens, nay, as trustees of the heritage and destinies of humanity?

In those coming days the world's happiness or unhappiness, public or private, will be largely, whoever you may be, of your making. Of the mighty past, mighty in evil as in good, you are inheritors. But to that past you are not in bondage. In the immemorial quest of goodness you are free, not enslaved. With well-gotten

knowledge, with unclouded vision, with indomitable will and impregnable love, you also may bring the old world — not indeed to any new world of Utopia, but perceptibly farther on the difficult, difficult way. For after all are we not all explorers, adventurers in life? Each of you — yes, boy or girl — was born a spiritual Columbus. And out there, somewhere across the great storm-waters of desire, lies the land of all our dreams — the Land of Promise, the new Jerusalem. Will you not equip and brace yourselves — even as Elodie had equipped and braced herself — to the perilous adventure, and steadily facing discomfort and death steer dauntlessly, a deep joy in your hearts, to the hidden haven you will never see! In what ship? Our English Laureate shall tell you:

“The Ship of Life”

“Who builds a ship must first lay down the keel
Of health, whereto the ribs of mirth are wed;
And knit, with beams and knees of strength, a bed
For decks of purity, her floor and ceil;
Upon her masts, adventure, pride and zeal,
To fortune’s wind the sails of purpose spread;
And at the prow make figured maidenhead
O’erride the seas and answer to the wheel.
And let him deep in memory’s hold have stor’d
Water of Helicon; and let him fit
The needle that doth true with Heaven accord;

Then bid her crew, Love, Diligence and Wit,
With Justice, Courage, Temperance come aboard,
And at her helm the master, Reason, sit."

Those are winged words, which, believe me, it is well worth your while to try to understand. And having understood, will you not — for our lost Elodie's dear sake, for your country's dear sake, and for your own dear sakes — will you not store and treasure them in your hearts, out of which, as you know, are "the issues of life?"

Your unknown shipmate and well-wisher,
Elodie's Mr. "Schoolmaster."
(JOHN RUSSELL)



• *A Few Verses by* ELODIE •

• •

“*Of* Fields, Flowers, Birds *and* Beasts
she spoke *and* she loved little
other Company so well.”



• SPRING •

• •

The birds are singing merrily,
The brooks begin to flow,
All nature now awakens,
For Spring has come, you know.

The little buds are bursting,
The trees are leaving fast,
All nature is so happy
That the dreary winter's past.

So very young and tender,
So frail is everything,
I think of all the seasons
The loveliest is Spring.

July, 1913

• THE ROBINS •

• •

A robin lives in the willow tree
Down by the river so gay.
And she sits in her nest of moss and hair
And sings to herself all day.

Four little eggs in that nest of hair
Four little robins will soon be there.
Four little mantels of gray and brown,
Four little nests as soft as down.

Each little robin its wings must try,
For soon 'twill be time they learned to fly.
Each little bird has its nest to make,
One made his by a lovely lake.

Another his home in an apple tree,
And now is as happy as happy can be.
One built his nest in a shady nook,
And by it runs a rippling brook.

And last of all this robin made
His little home in a mossy glade.
And oh, how I wish you were there to see
The robins that lived in the willow tree.

To Mother

Christmas, 1912

• VALENTINE •

• •

This very small message
At first must seem queer,
For you think: not much *love*
Can be written in here.

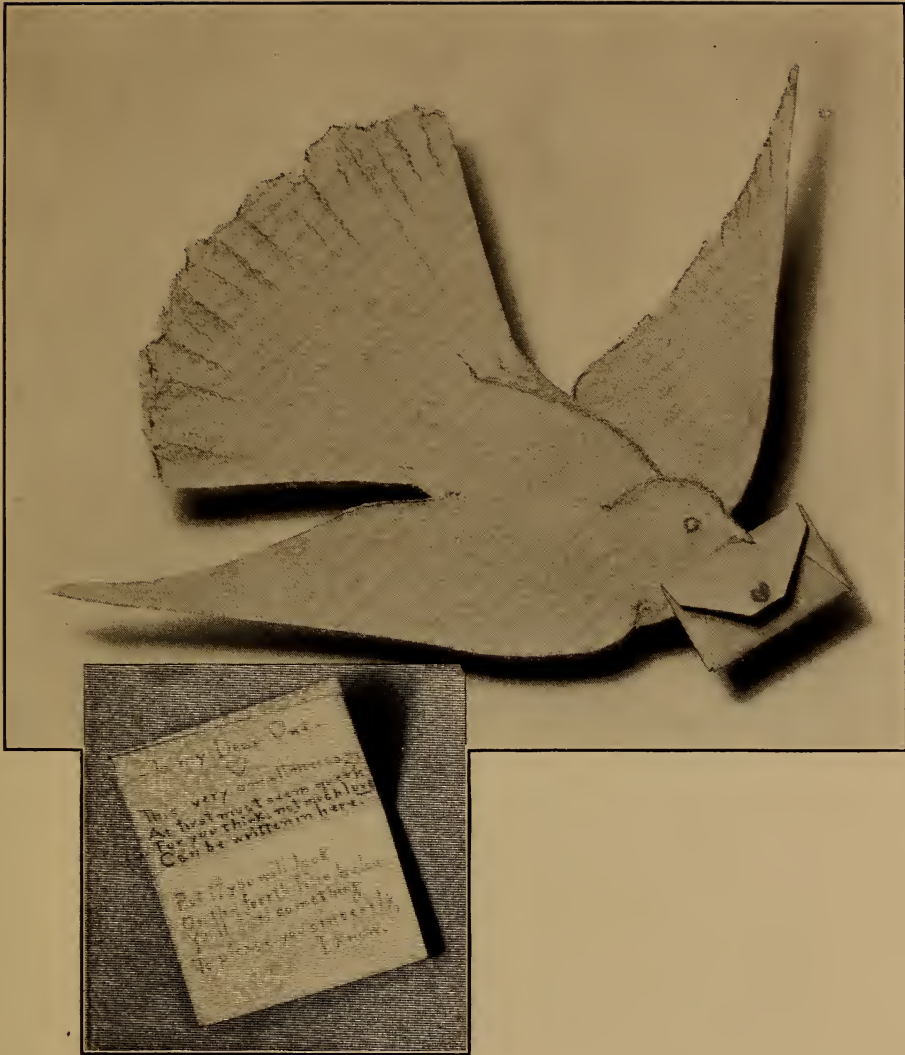
But if you will look
On the fourth line below,
You'll find something to please you
Sincerely, I know.

There is one who doth love thee
With all her small heart.
There is one who would ne'er
From thy side ever part.

For she loves her dear Valentine
More'n any other —
I'll tell you who 'tis,
This Valentine's — Mother!

To Mother

February 14, 1914



*A Cut-out Valentine made by Elodie.
The reproduction of the verse is exact
size. This tiny sheet was folded and
enclosed in envelope held in dove's bill.*



-The Chickadee-
to Mother
Dec. 25, 1913.

One day, as I was strolling,
When the leaves were falling fast,
I heard a little voice call out
From the thicket, as I passed.

It seemed to me so cheery,
Midst other things so sad,
That I stopped and listened happily
To that little voice so glad.

From silvery breast and tiny throat
Came notes so sweet and low.
It seemed to invite me thither,
As it fluttered to and fro.

And best of all he journeys not
To a warmer clime than ours,
But stays with us the winter through,
Till spring shall bring her flowers.

Facsimile reproduction of "The Chickadee"
Verses, decoration and lettering by Elodie

• THE CHICKADEE •

• •

One day, as I was strolling,
When the leaves were falling fast,
I heard a little voice call out
From the thicket, as I passed.

It seemed to me so cheery,
Midst other things so sad,
That I stopped and listened happily
To that little voice so glad.

From silv'ry breast and tiny throat
Came notes so sweet and low,
It seemed to invite me thither,
As it fluttered to and fro.

And best of all he journeys not
To a warmer clime than ours,
But stays with us the winter through,
Till Spring shall bring her flowers.

To Mother

December 25, 1913

• THE FIELD DAISY •

• •

Oh! dearest little daisy
Nodding in the sun,
Always bright and happy,
Cheering every one.

Your dainty snow-white petals
And loving heart of gold
Gladden all the passers,
Whether young or old.

There are many lovely flowers,
Of different sort and hue,
But I know not of a merrier,
More friendly one than you.

To Mother

May, 1913

• THE BIRDS •

• •

Hear the bird's sweet voices ringing
Thro' the forest cool and fair.
As they fly about us singing
In the soft midsummer air.

Their little hearts are bursting
Forth with love and song;
They try to make us happy
And help the days along.

At morning when we waken
They sing with cheer and mirth.
What happier little creatures
Could one find on all this earth!

To Daddy
March 3, 1913

KEEKAMOOCOAUG FARM

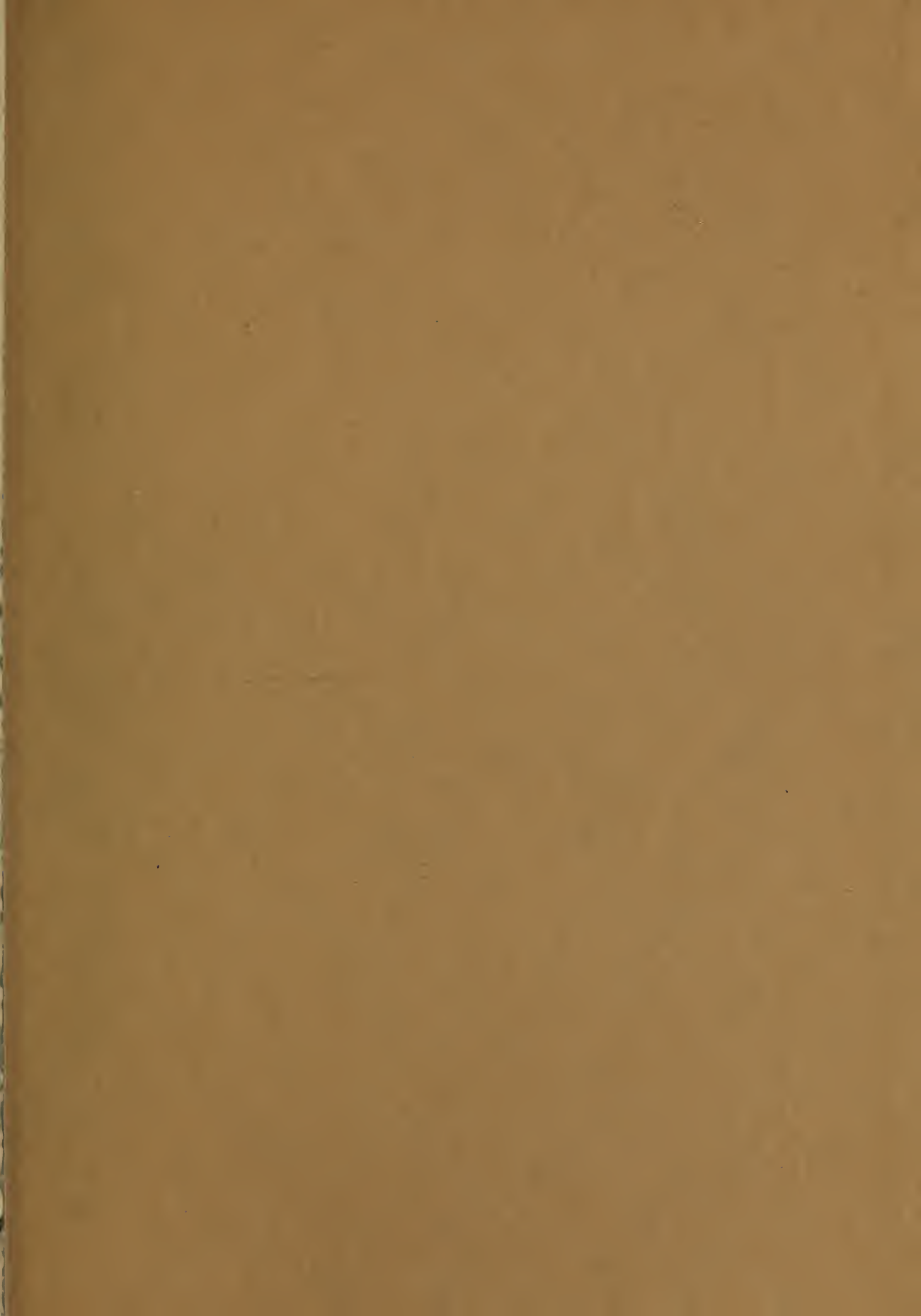
• •

Oh, how I love this quiet farm!
'Tis so peaceful in all its simple charm.
My eyes upon the view can feast,
Whether looking North, South, West or East.

I love the little kittens,
The dear old doggie, too,
I love the little Tom Thumb room,
I love them all, don't you?

But what I really love the best
Are my friends so very dear,
Who asked me to this lovely spot.
I'm so happy to be here.

*Written for the visitors' book
Dudley, Mass.
July 2-12, 1913*





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